

Correspondence

Genetics and Homosexuality

TO THE EDITOR: I was appalled and offended by the implication that male homosexuality is a "psychiatric" or "behavioral disorder," genetically linked, in this classification, with "human aggression," "anxiety or neuroticism," "attention-deficit hyperactivity and reading disability," "novelty seeking," "schizophrenia," and "manic depressive illness," as discussed by Reus in the March 1996 issue of *THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE*.¹ Genetic linking of sexuality or sexual preferences is as normal as genetic linking of gender, skin color, and many other human attributes and should not be listed in a grouping of otherwise abnormal behaviors or illnesses.

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REFERENCE

1. Reus VI: Behavioral genetics. *West J Med* 1996; 164:260

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Dr Reus Responds

TO THE EDITOR: Linda H. Morse, MD, is mistaken in her interpretation of my comments in the epitome in the March 1996 issue of *THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE*. There was no intended nor actual linkage of male homosexuality to psychiatric or behavioral disorders. The review was of a number of recent studies in "behavioral genetics," and while it is true that many have focused on specific illnesses, several have attempted to find genetic determinants of normal complex human traits. The epitome, which was critical of premature interpretations in this area, included two studies that explored normal behavior, one investigating the

temperament dimension of "novelty seeking," and the other, male homosexuality. It should be pointed out that the study associating the dopamine D₄ receptor polymorphism with the personality trait of "novelty seeking," reported by Ebstein and co-workers, used normal volunteers from a hospital and university in Israel and that their findings were replicated by a group from the National Institutes of Health on a cohort of 315 normal subjects who were evenly split with regard to homosexual or heterosexual orientation.¹

The recent finding on homosexuality does not exclude the possibility of genetic contributions to heterosexuality, and such reports would have been included had they been available; the imputation of abnormality would be inappropriate in either case, as it would reflect a social judgment rather than a biologic fact. The study of homosexuality by Hamer and colleagues was published in a leading journal, received widespread media attention, and has been expanded into a book for the lay public.² I do not agree with Dr Morse that it should not be discussed along with other studies of the genetics of behavior, any more than I feel that a finding of a gene for skin color or hair growth should be prohibited from being mentioned in a review of genetic findings in dermatology or a gene for nutritional preference in a discussion of genetic advances in cardiology.

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REFERENCES

1. Benjamin J, Li L, Patterson C, et al: Population and familial association between the D₄ dopamine receptor gene and measures of novelty seeking. *Nature Genet* 1996; 12:81-84
2. Hamer D, Copeland P: *The Science of Desire*. New York, NY, Simon & Schuster, 1994

The Editors are pleased to receive letters commenting on articles published in the journal in the past six months, as well as information or short case reports of interest to our readers. ALL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR CONSIDERATION MUST BE DOUBLE-SPACED. Letters NO LONGER THAN 500 WORDS are preferred. An original typescript and one copy should be submitted. All letters are published at the discretion of the Editors and subject to appropriate editing. Those of a scientific nature will be peer reviewed. Authors should include information regarding conflict of interest, when appropriate ("I warrant that I have no financial interest in the drugs, devices, or procedures described in this letter"). Most letters regarding a previously published article will be sent to the authors of the article for comment. Authors of accepted letters will have an opportunity to review the edited version before publication.